DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 373 842 JC 940 493

AUTHOR Osterthun, Stuart J.
TITLE A Critical Analysis of Community College Journalism Programs.
PUB DATE May 94
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Advertising; Community Colleges; *Educational Demand; *Employer Attitudes; Higher Education; *Journalism Education; Mass Media; Newspapers; Occupational Surveys; Public Relations; Radio; *Technical Education; Transfer Programs; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Community college journalism programs have a long-standing tradition of being transfer programs, which, in contrast to career programs, often take longer, are more expensive, and offer no guarantee of a job after graduation. If community colleges offered intensive 2-year technical journalism programs that mixed basic skills such a composition, algebra, speech, and computers with a wide variety of journalism courses, more students could finish the program faster and be qualified for professional media positions upon completion. A survey of 348 Midwest media professionals was conducted to determine if they would hire graduates from a 2-year program. A total of 104 responses were received from 35 publishers, 29 managing editors, 29 radio station managers, 7 advertising executives, and 4 public relations specialists. Study findings included the following: (1) the skills most important to employers were writing, language, listening, and social skills; (2) the skills representing the greatest deficits among recent journalism graduates were in the areas of time management, writing, and language; and (3) 82 of 96 media professionals agreed there might be an occasion where they would hire graduates from a two-year technical program; however, 49 out of 102 respondents would prefer four-year college graduates. Journalism programs tend to have fewer students enrolled than other programs. However, if a two-year technical program were offered, addressing such issues as reporting, writing, editing, photography, ethics, advertising, broadcasting, public relations, and media law, enrollments would increase. (KP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 373 842

A Critical Analysis of Community College Journalism Programs

Stuart J. Osterthun

Southwestern College

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Osterhun

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Running head: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE

JC 940 493

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

A survey of 348 media professionals in the Midwest indicates that a shift in paradigm for community college journalism programs may be necessary. For decades, two-year journalism programs have been under the jurisdiction of the general education program and set up as transfer curricula to four-year colleges and universities. Of the media professionals in the Midwest who participated in a survey to analyze community college journalism programs, 87 percent of those who answered the question said there might be an occasion when they would hire graduates from a two-year technical journalism program. A number of respondents favor community college journalism programs over four-year schools. The affordability of two-year graduates, the preparation students receive in community college journalism programs, and the eagerness of the students to learn are some reasons cited. Journalism is a performance-based field where results of a person's efforts are measurable. Therefore, community college students should be given the opportunity to study in an intense two-year technical program which has more depth and meaning than the limited curriculum of the current transfer program. It was this writer's intent to show that there is a demand for such a program, which would benefit community colleges and the regions they serve.

A Critical Analysis of

Community College

Journalism Programs

Community college journalism programs have a long-standing tradition as being str[illegible] transfer curriculums to four-year colleges and universities. Students have limited class options and often are encouraged by advisers at four-year schools to complete only the basic skills needed to transfer. Then, while at the four-year school, students are instructed to immerse themselves in the full-blown journalism curriculum. The process takes years, costs thousands of dollars, and comes with no guarantee of a job after graduation.

But what if community colleges offered an intense two-year technical journalism program that mixed basic skills such as composition, algebra, speech and computers with a wide variety of journalism courses? Students could finish the program in two years, save a substantial amount of money, and be qualified for professional media positions once they successfully complete the program.

Little research in this area has been completed, which may indicate that status quo is an acceptable standard in the field of journalism. To arrive at some measurable data that would address this issue, a survey of 348 media professionals in the Midwest was conducted. Surveys were sent to newspaper publishers, managing editors, radio and television station managers, public relations specialists and advertising executives. Much of the data collected indicates a need for two-year journalism programs to be technical in nature, to prepare students for a job once

they have successfully completed 62 hours of course work. Some of the data indicates a preference for graduates from four-year schools.

A one-page survey to help support this study was comprised of six closed-ended questions and two questions which solicited respondents' suggestions. This writer wanted to see if there was a need for graduates from two-year technical journalism programs. Also, is there a desire for such graduates?

Table 1 shows the number of degrees employees possess for each of the five respondents in the survey. Note the fact that of the 760 employees categorized by degree, 320, or 42 percent, had no degree. This would indicate a need for two-year technical journalism programs.

Placing well-rounded individuals into the work force should be a priority of community colleges. Technical programs need to do more than populate industry with operators for equipment that will be outdated in five years. They need more than faculty, students, and a few pieces of equipment, and the hope of high placement. They need a program mission that emphasizes the life-long well-being of their students. Students must learn that there is more to life than working with high-tech equipment and collecting a paycheck. We ought to promote critical thinking, and we must encourage students to elevate their expectations for personal and career fulfillment. (Wells, 1991).

For decades, community colleges have worked closely with business and industry in the school's service area. When industry requests 40 hours of retraining for employees, the community college is there to accommodate.

Table 1

Degrees Held by Employees of Respondents to Survey

Media Representative	Masters	Bachelors	Associates	None
Publisher	7	76	9	119
Managing Editor	7	158	15	44
Station Manager	4	88	25	125
P.R. Specialist	0	14	1	30
Advertising Executive	1	31	4	2
Totals	**19**	**367**	**54**	**320**

As community colleges begin to explore new alliances with business and industry, they will be required to examine new approaches to teaching and learning for the special clients they serve (O'Banion, 1994). One such approach that involves an entire program change is this idea of a two-year technical journalism curriculum. Since no research on the topic was found by this writer, measurable data had to be collected.

Method

Subjects

Three-hundred forty-eight media professionals from the Midwest were mailed surveys. A list of media professionals was compiled by using Editor & Publisher Yearbook for print media, a directory of radio and television stations, and a directory of public relations and advertising agencies. One-hundred four responses were received: 35 from publishers, 29 each from managing editors and station managers, seven from advertising executives and four from public relations specialists.

Procedure

Six survey questions were multiple choice in nature. Two of the six included space for additional responses. Two additional topics were listed for the purpose of soliciting opinion from the respondents. Instructions in a cover letter that accompanied the survey asked respondents to complete the survey and return it in a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Results

Tables 2-5 reveal a variety of data collected. Table 2 shows skills employers felt were mandatory for employment at their companies. Table 3 lists the skills employers consider to represent the greatest deficits among recent college graduates in journalism. Table 4 indicates that the majority of respondents would hire graduates from a two-year technical journalism program. And Table 5 shows that most of the respondents still favor graduates from a four-year program.

It is interesting to note some of the comments made relating to the tables. Additional responses from managing editors relating to Table 2 include graphic design, sensitivity, agricultural knowledge, photography, broadcast news, self-motivation, broad liberal arts background, meet deadlines under stress and the willingness to work. One managing editor wrote, "While we need all of the above skills, we are unable to offer the salary required by people with degrees. We look for people who are able to write, who are self-disciplined and open to learning."

Additional responses from publishers relating to Table 3 include flexibility; adaptability; knowledge of government, science, arts and math; hard worker and grammar and sentence structure.

Question six read, "You are considering two individuals for a position of employment. One is a graduate from a four-year journalism school, the other from a two-year journalism school. If the only difference you can identify is the degree itself, which would you hire?"

Eighty-seven percent of those surveyed who answered that question responded

Table 2

Skills Mandatory for Consideration as an Employer

Skill	Pub.	Man.Ed.	Sta.Mgr.	P.R.Spec.	Ad.Exec.
Keyboarding	30	17	8	3	2
Interviewing	12	19	7	3	2
Relational (social)	18	16	18	1	6
Listening	20	21	21	2	5
Analytical	14	11	13	1	3
Organization	17	16	18	2	5
Time Management	22	20	18	2	6
Creativity	20	18	20	3	4
Language	26	18	23	2	2
Writing Process	25	24	19	3	3

Table 3

Skills Representing the Greatest Deficits Among Recent College Graduates in Journalism

Skill	Pub.	Man.Ed.	Sta.Mgr.	P.R.Spec.	Ad.Exec.
Keyboarding	1	2	0	0	1
Interviewing	1	9	4	0	4
Relational (social)	5	2	7	0	0
Listening	5	7	3	1	5
Analytical	5	7	7	2	1
Organization	6	7	11	1	1
Time Management	10	14	18	3	3
Creativity	3	2	7	1	0
Language	11	8	10	0	1
Writing Process	13	14	11	3	4

Table 4

Might There be an Occasion When You Would Hire Graduates From a Two-Year Technical Journalism Program?

Media Representative	Yes	No	No Answer
Publisher	22	4	1
Managing Editor	23	6	1
Station Manager	27	1	0
P.R. Specialist	3	1	0
Advertising Executive	7	0	0
Totals	**82**	**12**	**2**

Table 5

Consideration of Graduates From Four-Year or Two-Year Journalism Programs

Media Rep.	4-Year Deg.	2-Year Deg.	Either	No Res.
Publisher	12	7	13	2
Managing Editor	17	5	5	2
Station Manager	13	8	2	5
P.R. Specialist	1	1	1	1
Advertising Executive	6	0	0	1
Totals	**49**	**21**	**21**	**11**

as expected by circling the person with the two-year degree. This writer felt the question was worded in a manner that would yield no other answers. Those who did not respond as expected provided comments such as "the degree would have no bearing," and "I would hire the one I thought would do the best job."

Discussion

The two-year technical journalism program would appeal to students not planning or wanting to transfer to a four-year school. Not all community college students plan to matriculate to universities. Employed persons may be taking a course or two for continuing education, or some may be seeking a certificate in a two-year program (Buckner, 1993).

With the current watered-down curriculum of community college journalism programs, students don't transfer with the necessary skills to acquire jobs. Two-year college instructors each term must take a rough-cut stone and polish it. That seems more of a challenge than adding a shiny finish to a stone that was pretty well polished before I received it. It is still fashionable in some quarters to regard products of the two-year college as being somehow inferior to their counterparts at senior institutions (Mack, 1985).

Just how much is a degree worth? How much is experience worth? A managing editor responded to question six by saying that the degree didn't matter. "For this small of a weekly it's not what sort of degree you have, the question is whether you would want to put in 60 hours plus a week for $300 doing numerous non-related duties."

Cowley County Community College & Area Vocational-Technical School, Arkansas City, Kansas, offers students a major in journalism only as a transfer program. The curriculum consists of Introduction to Mass Communication, News Reporting, News Editing, Introduction to Photography, Advanced Photography, Newspaper Production and Magazine Production. Internships with local and area media also are available for college credit (Catalog, 1993-95). Hands-on experience with newspapers, radio and television stations and advertising agencies have proven beneficial to students.

But are students who leave Cowley's journalism program ready for a job in the profession? Do they possess the necessary skills to qualify? In all likelihood, the answer is no. If they are to find employment in their chosen career, they must transfer to a four-year school and complete the requirements for a bachelor's degree.

Journalism is an important field of study as it lies under the umbrella of communications. We must remind our school leaders, the boards and presidents and deans and department heads that journalism education is a key to survival of a society for and by the people. In its synergistic meld with such studies as history, political science, philosophy, religion, literature and the arts, journalism and mass communications studies should be integral in preparing students for democracy (Buckner, 1991).

The Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology lists 18 schools across the United States that offer broadcasting programs. Twenty-

five schools are listed under the heading broadcasting technician. There were 25 accredited schools listed for another career in journalism, photography. However, studio and art photography schools were listed among the 25, indicating that photojournalism is not taught at all 25 schools.

Another selling point for the two-year technical journalism program is its attractiveness to minorities. The majority of minority students studying journalism across the country enroll in community colleges (Odom, 1991).

The cost to attend a two-year technical journalism program is substantially less than obtaining a four-year degree. As the needs of students, both traditional and non-traditional, continue to be more diverse, community colleges must step to the forefront to meet those needs.

Complex social organizations that do not evolve, adapting to changing circumstances, eventually die. Educational institutions are no exception. They must meet the current and future needs of people they serve in ways that those people expect. Educational institutions that do not — that cling to old paradigms of which needs to serve and how to serve them — will not survive (Findlen, 1994).

Of the dozens of industries that can illustrate this change, few offer a more potent example than the printing industry, which is related to journalism. Traditional skills, and more importantly the education and training systems that lay behind their development, produced successful printers up to about 1970. Such skilled persons were able to be either independent entrepreneurs or to work as employees. Both society and the individual were served well with the time-based

vocational education and training approaches of the day (Walsh, 1993-94).

Journalism programs tend to have fewer students enrolled than do other programs (Morgan, 1992). However, if a two-year technical program were offered, enrollment would increase because there is a need for graduates of the program. If there is work waiting after an associate's degree, more students will enter the program. The survey, mailed primarily to small-market media organizations, indicates a need for graduates who study community journalism.

In conclusion, implementing two-year technical journalism programs will enhance American education as it attempts to go through reform from preschool to post-graduate.

A changing world needs new ideas. The more there are, the more used we shall get to them. Thinking the unthinkable is a way of getting the wheel of learning moving, in society as much as in individuals (Handy, 1989).

Given the importance of community colleges and given the importance of quality in writing and journalism, it makes sense for community colleges to offer technical journalism programs. A community college journalism program, in order to be effective and help students reach their full potential, must address such issues as reporting, writing, editing, photography, ethics, advertising, broadcasting, public relations and media law, to name several.

It behooves us as educators at all levels to address these issues and the needs of our students. Since community colleges are growing exponentially, there is no more qualified institution of higher learning to accomplish this task. Community

colleges comprise almost 40 percent of all higher education institutions. Just over 50 percent of all first-time freshmen college students in the United States are enrolled in community colleges (AACC, 1993).

Community college journalism programs also could be a foundation for many other ventures in writing, thinking and reading. We stress basic composition, but journalism could be a component of our understanding of English writing.

Another argument in favor of implementing such a program is that given the technological advancements in recent years, two-year journalism students studying in a focused intense curriculum would yield more expertise.

In 1989, 448,997 associate's degrees were awarded. Of these, 57 percent were in occupationally-specific programs. Fifty-seven percent of the occupationally-specific degrees were awarded to females (AACC, 1993).

It is interesting to note that most of the respondents in the survey still preferred graduates from a four-year journalism program. Are we stuck on the paradigm that a four-year degree equates to a higher quality graduate than someone with a two-year degree?

What is a degree worth? The median income of males with an associate's degree is 26 percent higher than for those with a high school diploma, 33 percent higher for females with an associate's degree (AACC, 1993).

Is more always better? Is it possible that a creative graduate from a two-year journalism program could be as successful as one possessing a four-year degree?

References

American Association of Community Colleges. (1993). Community Colleges: A National Profile. Washington, DC: Author.

Buckner, T. (1991). Local school media essential to conditioning for democracy. Community College Journalist, 19(3-4), 23.

Buckner, T.A. (1993). Journalism in the two-year college. Community College Journalist, 21(1), 10-13.

1993 Directory of Private Accredited Career Schools and Colleges of Technology. (1993), Washington, D.C.: Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology.

Findlen, G. (1994). Technical colleges: Cling to the past or change to the future? Community College Journal, 64(4), 30-33.

Handy, C. (1989). The age of unreason. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Mack, W. (1985). Moving up to a community college. Community College Journalist, 21(1), 8-9.

Morgan, G. (1992). Cost argument proving this year's rationale for closing California student newspapers. Community College Journalist, 20(4), 23.

O'Banion, T. (1994). Teaching and learning: A mandate for the nineties. Community College Journal, 64(4), 21-25.

Odom, M. (1991). San Antonio effort brings SPJ to the community college campus. Community College Journalist, 19(3-4), 16.

Walsh, J. (1993-94). It's off to work we go: Why education must be re-

engineered. Community College Journal, 64(3), 34-37.

Wells, D. (1991). Managing technology: A vision for the 22nd century. Community College Journal, 62(2), 50-51.